

1919 - 1920  
A CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF  
VIRGIL FRAUGHTON  
HEBER, UTAH

Heber City, Utah  
February 11, 1974

Zero outside; 11 A.M.. Has been cold for several days; the coldest was 33 below zero about a month ago. About one-half foot of snow on the ground.

Looking at some old letters the other day I found an old letter written to me by my wife, Lillie, dated February 26, 1920; a little more than fifty years ago, when I was working for J.S. Murdock at his Current Creek Ranch at Fruitland, Utah, about one-half hour drive from here now. But, fifty years ago conditions were a lot different, and the letter brought to mind some of the people that lived there then and some of the happenings during about a year when I worked there.

I started working for Murdock in the Spring of 1919. He was feeding a bunch of cattle in the Northfields at Heber and wanted me to move them to the head of Daniel Canyon to Spring and Summer range in Strawberry, Deep Creek and Current Creek where the cattlemen from Wasatch County had access to grazing land, before it was taken by Utah Water Users Association and others. Charlie Brunson and myself drove cattle to about McGuire Canyon; from about there over the head of Daniel Canyon to about the Strawberry Bridge. The road had never been traveled during the winter except by a few, but there was not a very wide trail that a horse or cattle could walk on, if not rushed.

We got some of the older cows that had been where we were trying to go before on lead, and started up the trail. We saw Ace Bethers before we got started up. He shut his dog up and helped on the summit as much as he could to keep the cattle moving. After a lot of riding and maneuvering, we got the cattle strung out and moving up. Being a cold moonlight night, the snow got harder and the trail got some better. We worked with the cattle all night, and next morning they were all over the top. The snow was moving off the valley fast during the day; the hills facing the South were partly bare, and there was quite a lot of good feed showing up.

The old cattle corrals at that time were about where the State road house and shops are now. The cattle were put in corrals, and the ones to summer in Strawberry were cut out and left there; the others were taken to range farther down. Work at the ranch was then started, it was in quite a mess. The road down Current Creek was on the opposite side of the creek from where it is now. It is from about where the bridge is now by the Current Creek Lodge, up along the side hill and down about two miles before going up on the Fruitland Bench. The road was changed to about where it is now, so we built a bridge over the creek for easier access and cut a road through the trees and willows on sides of the creek and over to the old house on the cleared part of the flat. There was an old corral barn and some sheds and a man and woman were living there who moved up on the bench where they had filed on a homestead. On the lower part of the cleared ground there were several mounds of soil and clay about maybe six or eight feet long and eight or ten feet in diameter; they were leveled down with plow and scraper. Part of the flat was later plowed with disc plow, harrowed and planted with grain. When the high water was over, a dam was made in the creek and the irrigation ditch cleaned out. A shearing corral and pens were made in the old shed. When sheep came off the East Winter Range, several shearers from Fruitland and Duchesne County, etc., came and sheared several herds; it was all done with blade shears by hand. Later in the year, a dipping vat was built on the Rone Smith Ranch in Deep Creek, and all sheep in the surrounding areas were dipped. After the ewes were lambed out, docking

page 2

corrals were fixed up and lambs were all earwashed and their tails cut off; the male lambs had their testicles cut out. At that time all the operation was done with a sharp knife. When the lambs bag that holds their testicles was opened, the easiest way to get what was wanted out was to get hold of them with your teeth and pull them up while you cut them loose from the lamb; sure was a bloody, dirty face for the operator. What they cut out, the common name was lamb nuts. They were some times saved, and after washing and cleaning were cooked in a frying pan. After cooking they were called Rocky Mountain Oysters. They were sure good with sour dough biscuits and sheepherder coffee. The ewes and lambs were separated mostly, the ewes outside the corrals. And every sheep blattting sure was a bedlam. As the lambs were doctored, they were put out with the ewes all dirty and bloody. But in a short time they were back with their mother. A dipping vat was built at the Rone Smith Ranch; I don't remember what time of the year. Some medicine was boiled up and all the sheep near were dipped. Several men were hired by the Murdock's to work at different times during the summer to help with the sheep and to build the place up.

My wife, Lillie, and my three children; Virgie, Dee, and Marie, who was two or three months old at that time, came out from our home in Heber; the same home we still live in now; and stayed during the summer months. We fixed the old house at the ranch up and a Home on the Range wagon for Lillie and Marie in a nice shady place. Curt and Meda Murdock were there a lot of the time; they had a Range Wagon also.

There was good fishing in Current Creek at that time (53 years ago) and some beaver there; the beaver sometimes dammed the irrigation ditch up during the night. During the summer and fall, J.S. Murdock and wife would come to the ranch for a visit and help with the work and enjoyed being there. He had a small truck with a rack on it (I forgot the make of truck) and go to Fruitland Store, run by Mr. Brooks, for groceries and supplies. He also bought from the farmers living there at that time - like some pigs, chickens, grain, and bring to the ranch; or a stack of hay to be hauled when needed. Some of the farmers lead some water through a small ditch from Red Creek, but their crops were not very big.

Brooks store was about one-half mile or so north of where it is today, and a building across the road served for meeting house, school house, dance hall (upstairs), church, and etc. When my wife and I needed to go to the store, we hitched a pair of good looking horses on to a fringe top surrey and went in style. We always had plenty of grain-fed horses and we always had good ones. All the power we had was horses. We hauled pine fence poles from Rone Smith ground and got cedar posts off the mountain and built good horse corrals and gates.

We had plenty of irrigation water and a fairly good drop of grain and hay and some pasture. My brother, Max (generally called Mode), after getting home from 1st War, got a job and helped with the work. He stayed and did some trapping - coyotes, cats, some mink along the creek, and had a permit to catch some beaver that were doing damage.

When school started in Heber, my wife went home so our daughter and son could go to school. Fall season was coming soon, and all the sheep that were sold were eventually taken to winter range. Later a bunch of bucks which had been pastured at the head of Deep Creek during the summer were taken to winter range and mixed with the ewes.

page 3

We went with teams and wagons to Sam Jones's sawmill at Sugar Springs in Strawberry Valley and hauled several loads of lumber to fix houses up for the winter. We cut and hauled some pine trees in Deep Creek to use for stringers to make a bridge over the Creek. Reed Dahlman, J.S. Murdock and I worked getting them down to the ranch on Thanksgiving Day. Reed's ears were nipped with the cold and frost, J.S. ruined his pants, and there was not another pair big enough for him to be found. So, he cut some holes in the bottom of a wool sack for his legs and fastened it so it wouldn't fall off, and it worked quite well.

D. L. Ryan (Leslie) came to the ranch with several horses to use for bait to poison coyotes. He stayed most of the winter, killing these horses, putting poison in the carcasses and making small baits out of pieces of meat filled with strychnine, and scattered for coyotes to pick up and swallow. Ryan was working for some livestock company or government agency, I don't remember which. The horses were taken up on the mountain to graze until needed for bait.

We had about six or eight grain-fed hogs in a corral that looked like they would be good pork for eating. There were three of us there, and we decided we would butcher one. We didn't have a barrel to scald one in, all we had were #3 tin tubs. We heated water and tried to scald the hair off. We got a few patches off, then tried soaking wool sacks in boiling water and covering the pig, then pouring more boiling water over the pig, but it didn't do the job. However, we had some boog butcher knives and one man who kept them sharp while I shaved the hair off. My advice is not to try to shave a pig, it sure is a hard job.

A bunch of cattle, some cows, but mostly steers, were brought to the ranch to be put on Current Creek Mountain for the winter when sufficient snow came. The lower part of the mountain had not been grazed during the summer and the feed was pretty good. I think there were about one-hundred head to one-hundred and fifty head of cattle, I don't remember for sure. All there was on the mountain at that time were wild animals and a few wild horses.

It was mostly my job to see that the cattle were wintered, and if any can remember that winter, they will know what a wild one we had; lots of snow and wind. When Leslie Ryan and my brother Mode were there, they would make breakfast while I tended to the horses and did other chores outside. When daylight came, I would take off and ride most of the day watching the cattle. The drifts of snow got pretty bad; the road to Heber was closed tight, and the one to Duchesne was closed part of the time during snow storms. A road to Duchesne from Price was kept open and teams of horses, some four to six horse freight outfits and some trucks were hauling grain from the railroad in Price to Duchesne for the sheep on the East Desert where they were wintering. But part of the Deseret country was covered with crusted snow for a while. J. S. Murdock bought a truck for hauling grain from Price to the sheep, a large truck, I think it was called a 'White'.

It was getting rough on the mountain too. Quite a lot of deep drifts piled up, so I needed some help. Reed Dahlman and later Charles E. Brunson came. They were good hands and sure helped a lot. We hauled some grain from Duchesne with a team of horses when we had time, and some alfalfa hay from a stack in Fruitland that J.S. had bought in the Fall of the year. Where we unloaded this

page 4

hay, it had a lot of leaves around. I guess the cottontail rabbits hadn't been eating very well; they came to eat these leaves by the dozen. If you liked fried rabbit, it didn't take long to bag a good mess.

The people who lived in Fruitland had a dance occasionally in the upstairs of the school house. The George Muir Orchestra (his family) furnished the music; organ, guitars, violin, banjo, etc. We went over two or three times and had a lot of fun dancing and visiting. Rollo Lawton would call the Plain Quadrille; they also danced a waltz and one someone had named the Jarvis Wabble. You sort of hopped on one leg and drug the other foot along the floor for that one, then you would reverse and do it the other way.

Jode Averett, who was tending some cattle farther north and east on the Black Tail Mountain came to the dance, and he and Aunt Liz Rockhill got the prize for the best waltzers. George Muir sure was a good fiddler and made good music with his family, with organ, fiddle, guitars, mandolins and a drum. George sometimes had a bottle of refreshments on the corner of the organ. I think it was Gumie O Gum and Sweet       ?. He sometimes would get a little sleepy and miss the strings with his fiddle bow, or go under them, but the music went on just the same.

Niff Murdock's home and ground joined J.S. Murdock's on the east, and Daddy Mahoney lived alone on a place joing Niff Murdock on his east side. When the winter eased up some, Daddy Mahoney put out a few coyote traps near the road on the mountain. He rode an old horse up to check them one day and there was a coyote caught in one of the traps. When he got near it, the coyote jumped and and the old horse jumped sideways and Mahoney fell off and was hurt and had a hard time getting home. He couldn't care for himself, so he have his personal things to his friends in Fruitland. I bought his house and ground, and he was taken to Duchesne to be cared for. I later sold the place and Niff Murdock added it to his place.

I didn't know where old Mahoney had gone or what he was doing until about seven or eight years later; anyway it was after 1927, because I was working for Wasatch County as the elected sheriff from 1927 to 1939. I think it was in about 1930 that I called on a little old man living in a 8' x 10' tent near the Wolf Creek road by the South Fork of the Provo River. He was partly blind, and had been digging in a ledge of rock that showed some color for some rich ore, and it was the same little Daddy Mahoney. Being he was sick and blind with no one to care for him, I took him to Heber and then to the Old Folks Home between Provo and Springville by order of the Wasatch County Commissioners. I think his cost to live there was \$25.00 per month. Do you know what it costs now? I hope you never have to find out.

Today is April 1, 1974; the weather is cold and wet; rain and snow all day. I have been thinking of differences in our lives now and when our family was all together and happy, healthy, full of life and playing jokes on each other on April Fools Day. Like maybe when Lillie and the others made some light dough biscuits for my breakfast, and I got a mouth full of cotton from the center of one. Oh well, we can't stay young forever.

page 5

Well, I kind of got off what I was trying to write about (the year about 1920). Some of the people at Fruitland had a hard time getting through the hard winter. J.S. Murdock gave me a check book and said to buy some cedar posts from the men at Fruitland. Some of their horses were in kind of poor shape, but they rustled some posts and delivered them at the ranch. I bought about two thousand posts at twenty cents to thirty cents each, as I remember. That money was a big help to some of the settlers.

We had good luck with the cattle. We figured we lost five head, two of which were killed by coyotes or a lion; one fell in a wash, and two which just died. We crossed a bunch of the cattle across Current Creek onto the North rough side and on the flat over the top, when the snow was gone. There were a lot of tumbleweeds there that had been wet and frozen. The cattle ate lots of these weeds, and with warmer weather coming along, they did fine and were moved to the Spring and Summer range at the proper time.

An old bachelor named Jones had a cabin and some land about three miles west of Murdock's place near Current Creek. He lived alone and had a horse and buggy he used to drive to Fruitland Store to visit. One morning about daylight, I went up the creek to check on the cattle moving up past his place. I could see smoke coming through the chimney and a light inside, so I rode over and called to him. He came to the door with a rifle ready for action. He said, "Who are you and what do you want?" I said "What's the matter with you, you know who I am." He said, "Oh it's you Virg, come on in." When I got inside, I soon could see why he was up so early. He had rigged up a little outfit and was trying to make some moonshine whiskey. He had his outfit working. His mash was boiling in a copper boiler and the steam was going through some copper coils, through some cold water and out through a corner of his shack to condense and drip into a jug as moonshine. He had leaks in his outfit and had it all patched with rags, dough and etc. He showed me how it was dripping and caught some in a large spoon and showed me how it would burn when lit with a match. I didn't taste it - I didn't know what he made his mash out of, but I'll bet it was plenty potent.

He had a buggy and an old brown mare that he kept in a shed in the yard to haul him to the store and to visit around some. He was practicing shooting his rifle and a bullet glanced off a rock and hit his old mare and killed her, so he was handicapped for traveling. He came down to the Murdock ranch to see about getting another horse, and was fixed up with one that was all right for what he wanted and he went home happy. When he came, he brought a bottle of his brew along. Nobody wanted to try it, so it was set on a shelf out of the way and forgotten. Later, one of the men at the Murdock place got a bad toothache. There was no dentist in Fruitland, we didn't know about one in Duchesne; roads bad, man in awful pain. We found a pair of forceps in Fruitland owned by a man named Sweat and borrowed them. We decided to try to pull the tooth. It was a big wisdom tooth. We had nothing to deaden the pain of the aching tooth or of pulling it. Then someone thought of Jones's bottle of brew. We boiled the forceps in water and asked the man if he would like to drink a toddy made with Jones's brew to help kill the pain. He said no, but he guessed that it would be no worse than the pain he already had, so he drank a shot, rubbed some inside his mouth and gargled with it. I had a good low hold on the tooth with the forceps, one man steadied his head, another his arms and legs. A gentle twist and a hard pull and the tooth came out clean and whole. The next day the man was feeling okay.

page 6

During the early Spring, two or three men would make a trip to Heber over the snow and back to the ranch. On one trip, it was Niff Murdock and I who decided to go to Heber. In the evening time we rode to the Rockhill Store at Soldier Creek, just over the head of Deep Creek. There was no one there at the old abandoned building. We intended to wait there until the snow was frozen hard enough to hold our horse, about four o'clock in the morning it usually was. But, the weather kind of moderated during the night, and the snow was not quite hard enough. We started to go, but it wasn't getting any better. The horses started breaking through, but a man could walk on top okay, so when we got near a bare spot on the sidehill where the snow was blown off, we took our gear off the horses and started them back on the trail we had made so they could get back to the ranch. We covered everything over with sage brush and whatever brush there was and decided to walk across the Strawberry Valley, expecting to find someone at Ace Bether's Store. We hiked along at a fairly good pace, hoping the snow would not get too soft before we got there. We were sure tired, and Niff was walking with riding boots on his feet, so his heels were worn raw and bleeding. The store was closed up and nobody was there. We were sure hungry, not having brought food along, so we got inside and looked for something that might be eatable. There was some cut stove wood and a stove, some pots and pans, etc. We found a can with some coffee in it and a box of stale chocolate candy. We melted some snow and made coffee and ate chocolates with it. That sure gave us a lift. We later squared it with Ace for trespassing on his place.

After we rested a while and patched Niff's heels the best we could, we started slowly down Daniels Canyon. We got down almost to Center Canyon and the road was open and bare there. We heard a car coming, a welcome sound! The manager of Mountain States Telephone Company - named Sullivan - at Heber, had bought a car and was trying it out. He gave us a ride to Heber. That was the best ride in an old Model T I have ever had! Our horses got back to the ranch okay, and we got our riding gear a few days later.

When Spring finally came and the roads opened up, I left the ranch and went to work at the Heber Exchange Company, John A. Anderson, manager. I later went into the ice business.

I have made these scribblings at different times during the last couple of months when I got to feeling sorry for myself, and I try to think of something besides getting too old to work much, living alone and having to go to the doctor occasionally and being in a hospital for a while. My wife is in the hospital now and has been for about three months, and I don't know when she can come home. The high cost of living, the moochers that keep raising prices for no reason only to rob you, also bother me, etc.

Well, please excuse me if you should happen to read this scribbling, and, don't feel sorry for me. I was in the hospital for a while, and Lillie had to go there and is still there at this time. Writing this has helped pass a few dull and lonesome hours alone while getting to feel better. I will be 85 years old on July 4, 1974. My enemies are all dead. Spring is coming. I am feeling better and hope to get my wife home soon.

Bye

Hope I See You Later